

**GOVERNMENT EFFORTS IN CURBING BOKO HARAM
INSURGENCY IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES**

BY

LAWSON LUKA

Department of Humanities
Federal Government College, Ganye
PMB 1001 Ganye
Adamawa State
lawsonluka9@gmail.com
+2348036484094

And

ABDULRAZAK AIDE

Department of Political science and Administration
College of Social and Management Sciences
Adamawa State Polytechnic, Yola
abdulrazak.aide@gmail.com
+2347034802034

**BEING A PAPER PRESENTED AT THE INTERNATIONAL
CONFERENCE ON INSURGENCY AND THE PHENOMENON OF
BOKO HARAM IN NIGERIA ORGANIZED BY THE CENTRE FOR
ISLAMIC CIVILIZATION AND INTER FAITH DIALOGUE AND
INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT NIGERIA
@ BAYERO UNIVERSITY KANO
FROM 13TH TO 15TH NOVEMBER 2018**

Abstract

The main thrust of this paper is an examination of the issues and challenges of government efforts in curbing Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. The paper examines issues bordering on; the concept of Boko Haram and insurgency, historical antecedents of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, factors that gave rise to Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, effects of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, Government efforts in Curbing Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria and challenges militating against Government efforts in Curbing Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria. The paper revealed that despite government efforts at curbing Boko Haram, there are still attacks, kidnapping and the use of children and teenagers for suicide bombing by the group. This is an indication that the sect has defied government efforts aimed at curbing their excesses. Based on the conclusion drawn, the following recommendations were put forward: There is the need to strengthen security apparatus in the country to be able to confront any challenges to the state right from the entry point into the country and there should be adequate collaboration and partnership between the governments, non-governmental organizations as well as civil society organizations in order to curb this menace.

Keywords: Boko Haram, Insurgency, Government effort, challenges, Curbing, Nigeria

Introduction

Prior to Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, the country has had a long and unfortunate history of communal conflicts and ethno religious violence (Walker 2012) but the devastating effects of the Boko Haram insurgency on the population has generated mixed feelings, concerns, and triggered international condemnation. The current Boko Haram insurgency in the North-east geopolitical region of Nigeria that originally took the form of sectarian religious violence has escalated into terrorist activities with international linkages and affiliations making it a relatively difficult nut for the Nigerian government to crack (Gilbert, 2014).

Boko Haram insurgency in operation today in Nigeria first appeared in Maiduguri in Borno State, northeast Nigeria around 2002. The group's objective was to establish an Islamic state and institutionalize Sharia law in Nigeria, particularly the northeast region. Boko Haram activities in the northeast of Nigeria have created a serious security threat to Nigeria and Nigerians by engaging in guerrilla warfare using indiscriminate attacks on civilians and military forces. According to Agomuo (2011) what started around 2009 in the far flung North East geopolitical zone of the country as a child's play, has become a national disgrace and of international concern.

The emergence of the deadly group, whose activities assumed a worrisome dimension in 2009, has continued a reign of terror in parts of the country. This triggered the government to take decisive action against the group with the sole aim of curbing their menace, but despite the Nigerian government efforts and escalating military actions against the Boko Haram sect in Northern Nigeria which started with the arrest and extra-judicial execution of the groups founding leader Mohammed Yusuf in 2009, violent extremism and insurgency show no lasting sign of decline within the country. In recent time the extremist group (Boko Haram), continues to expand and commit violent acts, such as sporadic suicide bombings and killing of innocent citizens and foreigners within the country (Babalola, 2016). It is in line with the above that this paper is designed to examine the issues and challenges of government efforts in curbing Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria.

For the sake of clarity and easy understanding, the paper is organised under the following sub-headings:

- The Concept of Boko Haram
- The Concept of Insurgency
- Historical Antecedents of Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria

- Factors that gave Rise of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria
- Effects of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria
- Government Efforts at Curbing Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria
- Challenges facing Government Efforts at Curbing Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria
- Conclusion and Recommendations

The Concept of Boko Haram

The word “Boko Haram” came from Hausa and Arabic Languages. “Boko” which is a Hausa word means “*western or non- Islamic education*”, while “haram” on the other hand is an Arabic term meaning “*forbidden or prohibited*”. In Islam the word is used to refer to anything that is prohibited by the Islamic faith. Its antonym is “halal” (Okoro, 2012). Babalola, (2016) refers to Boko Haram as the “most recent extremist group in Nigeria,” which continues to commit a lot of violence and atrocities against soft targets. In essence, Boko Haram is a militant Islamic organization based in north-eastern Nigeria. The sect was founded by Mohammed Yusuf in 2002 and seeks to establish Islamic state in Nigeria (Farouk, 2015)”. The group's official name in Arabic is “Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad”, meaning people committed to the propagation of the tradition and jihad or "The Congregation of the People of Tradition for Proselytism and Jihad" (Medugu, 2017).

The Concept of Insurgency

The U.S Government Counterinsurgency Guide (2007) defines insurgency as the organized use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify, or challenge political control of a region. It is primarily a political struggle, in which both sides use armed force to create space for their political, economic and influence activities to be effective. To Hoffman (2003), insurgency or terrorism, as the case may be, may be seen as a violent act that is conceived specifically to attract attention and then, through the publicity it generates, to communicate a message.

Historical Antecedents of Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria

There are conflicting accounts on the origin of the Boko haram sect in north-eastern Nigeria. Some account hold that the sect is a splinter group of the Maitatsine that evolved in the 1970's, this is because like Boko haram, the Maitatsine leader had a strong distaste for Western influence as well as refused to accept the legitimacy of the state (Danjibo, 2009). Another account ties the origin of the sect to a group of radical Islamist youths who worshiped at the Al-Haji Muhammadu Ndimi Mosque in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state in the 1990's (precisely in 1995) the sect was led by Abubakar Lawan under the name

Ahlulsunna wal'jama'ah hijra, Abubakar Lawan subsequently left for Saudi Arabia to study at the University of Medina (International Crisis Group, 2014).

According to Shuaibu, Salleh and Shehu (2015), *Jama'ah al-Ahlu al-Sunnah Li al-Da'wah wa al-Jihad*, known as *Boko Haram* emerged as a peaceful local Salafist Islamic movement created in 2002 by Mohammad Yusuf (1970-2009), a radical Islamic cleric, in Maiduguri, Borno state, in North Eastern Nigeria. According to Chothia (2012) the sect had ulterior political goals to create an Islamic state and impose Sharia Laws, and it soon became a recruiting ground for future jihadist to fight the state.

Even though, the sect's leadership initially, did not call for violence, its followers however engaged in periodic clashes with security personnel during its formative years (Blanchard, 2014). The activities of Boko Haram took violent dimension in 2009 when Nigerian security forces, clashed with the group in five day violent that resulted in death of its leader Muhammad Yusuf and many of his followers (Umar 2011). Even though after the 2009 uprising, the activities of the group appeared to be dissipated, but they regroup and re-emerged in 2010 under the new leadership of Abubakar Shekau. Since the rise of the new leadership, attacks have escalated in terms of frequency and intensity. The group carried out its first attacks when it orchestrated a large prison breaks in September 2010 in Bauchi which led to the escape of more than 700 inmates including its members. The activities and attacks from the group has escalated in 2013, as a result, the Federal Government declared state of emergency in three most affected states of the region (Adamawa, Borno and Yobe States) in May 2013, extending the existing ones that have been declared in some parts of Borno and Yobe in late 2011 (Blanchard, 2014 and Lawson, 2015).

These attacks have increased substantially in frequency between 2013 and 2014 whereby the sect, in April 2014 adopted new tactics of kidnapping female students and women in the northeastern part of the country. On April 14th 2014, Boko Haram kidnapped nearly 300 students from Government Girls Secondary School Chibok, as a result of which the United Nation Security Council committee blacklisted the group on 22nd May 2014 (Nicholas, 2014). In recent times there is an increase in the use of children and teenagers especially the female ones for suicide bombing.

Factors that gave Rise of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria

It is clear that the emergence of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria has economic, political, religious and ethnic undertones. The above, the main factors that gave rise to Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria are:

1. **Economic Factors:** Olojo (2013) contends that one significant factor that has stimulated the drive towards violent extremism; recruitment and support for Boko Haram is economic deprivation (poverty). The vicious cycle of poverty continues to ravage the Nigerian society to the extent that majority of the citizens cannot afford three square meals per day. There is a general belief that poverty and longstanding economic disparities in the northeast part of the country made the youths to join the sect.
2. **Marginalization:** Adesoji (2010) stresses that, in Nigeria the marginalization and imbalance distribution or implementation of the resources made some radicalized scholars to preach against the government and democratic setting, which later gave birth to the present Boko Haram insurgency.
3. **Socio-cum-political factors:** Liolio (2013) stated that, it is significant to know that the root causes of the insurgency often relate to a long cloudy set of problems culminating into uncontrolled grievances and exploding violence. Such problems are socio-economic and political, that is why insurgencies are more rampant in underdeveloped countries or countries engulfed by corrupt regime, ethnicity, social prejudices as well as religious disharmony.
4. **Religious Factors:** Hoffman (2006) observed that religion has become the key motivator for several terrorist and insurgent organizations in Africa and the world. According to Gurr and Cole (2005), the proliferation and significance of religiously motivated terrorist groups is notable. Substantiating this, Zalman (2014) opined that religion fanaticism creates conditions that are formidable for terrorism and religious insurgencies.
5. **Proliferation of weapons:** The availability and the use of gun and other weapons of mass destruction and or disruption, namely, chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) weapons have continued to fuel terrorism and insurgency like Boko Haram. Sani (2011) cited in Mu`azu (2011) argued that the proliferation of arms in the north east as a result of Chadian civil war and illegal immigration are part of the reasons for the emergence of Boko Haram.
6. **The Almajiri Factor:** The Almajiris are children scattered all over the streets with calabash in their hands for alms begging, they are very dirty, hungry, and thirsty and in traffic hazards. In northern Nigeria, the Almajiris were seriously neglected. This makes them ready prey for the Boko Haram insurgents who are used as foot soldiers and suicide bombers.

Effects of Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria

The effects of the heinous activities of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria is overwhelming and devastating to include:

- 1. Destruction of Lives and Properties:** Since the activities of the sect assumed frightening dimensions from 2009 to date, there has been wanton destruction of countless innocent lives and properties worth billions of naira. Boko Haram has wantonly destructed the property worth of several billions of naira through bombing attacks (Oluwaseun, 2012).
- 2. Educational effects:** By implication, Boko Haram translates to war against western education. In Borno state the attacks had destroyed over 882 classrooms, in Yobe state all schools were shot from June to September 2013. On 6 March 2014, the federal government closed five Federal Colleges (Unity Schools) in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states, ordering their students to relocate to other schools. In addition to the above, parents fearing attacks have withdrawn their children from schools in a region that is the most educationally backward in the country. More to that Boko Haram insurgency has affected the present and future development of education in the country through attacks on the few available schools and educational facilities, kidnapping of school girls, killing of students and teachers.
- 3. Threat to National Security:** The Boko Haram scourge constitutes serious threat to national interest, peace and security of the country. The threat by the sect to detonate bombs, killed and kidnapped people is a serious national security threats that makes many Nigerians to relocate and cancel a lot of programmes and events. Even the government had to cancel some usual programmes and ceremonies like: Independence Day celebration and children's day celebration in some states.
- 4. Economic Effects:** According to Aro (2013) economically Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria negatively affects the state (Nigeria) and individual members of the state (Nigerians) by disrupting economic activities. Isakpa (2011) in his view on the negative impact of Boko Haram insurgency on the economy opined that "there can be no real progress made in any economy that is hostage to security".
- 5. Religious Effects:** The dangerous nature of attacks launched by the group has pitched Christians and Moslems against each other, owing to the wanton destruction of Churches in Northern Nigeria and lack of respect for the secularity of the nation. This situation portends great danger for religious harmony in the country because if pushed to the wall, reprisal attacks might be elicited against the Muslims in other parts of the

country by the Christians. The implications of these effects underscore the urgent need for a permanent resolution of the crisis (Akinbi, 2015).

6. **Instilling Fear among the Citizens:** Nigerian citizenry are now living in fears as a result of the Boko Haram insurgency occasioned by high degree of loss of life and damage to property and infrastructure through bombing and assassination and genocide. The list of death recorded since 2009 according to Jimmoh (2011), Igbokwe (2012), Okpaga, Chijioke and Eme (2012) is interminable. The Boko Haram Mayhem had no regard for any establishment, including security, international agencies, press, private individuals, emirs, churches and mosques. It has created a scenario of fear because nobody is safe in the country.

Government Efforts at Curbing Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria

Since the inception of Boko Haram in Nigeria, government has developed various strategies and put in efforts towards curbing their activities some of the efforts by government in curbing Boko Haram insurgency are:

1. **Appeal for international support:** The Government responded to the insurgency through appealing for international assistance to combat the domestic terrorism posed by the sect. These supports are in form of manpower, fund, intelligence, arms and ammunitions.
2. **The use of Dialogue:** The government has explored the option of dialogue with leaders of the sect and promising them amnesty if the sect lay down their arms.
3. **The use of military force against insurgent:** The government has responded and is still responding to the sect diligently by waging military expedition against it, but thus far, the military finds it very difficult to curb the sect's activities. In the recent time, the federal government deployed the specially trained anti-terrorism combat squad to the terrorist zones in order to suppress the activities of Boko Haram.
4. **Declaration of State of Emergency:** The government under the Ex- President Goodluck Jonathan's administration declared a state of emergency in Borno at the beginning of 2012. This was extended in May, 2013 to cover the entire North Eastern states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states of Nigeria (Lawson, 2015).
5. The latest response of the government under President Buhari manifested in the relocation of the Command and Control Centre of the Military to Maiduguri. This action is geared towards adding impetus and renewed vigor to **Operation Zaman Lafiya**, which is aimed at bringing terrorism and insurgency to an end. An alternate command centre was also being established in Yola, Adamawa State.

Challenges militating against Government efforts in Curbing Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria

In spite of the holistic approach that was adopted in curbing Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, the frequency of occurrence of the incidence of insurgency by Boko Haram is still visible, this is because of the following Challenges militating government efforts:

1. **Economic Corruption:** According to the Leadership Newspaper 10th March, 2014 the federal government over a period of four years, has spent about N3.38 trillion to combat insurgency alone (Eme and Ibietan, 2013). A thorough investigation about how those monies were spent reveals that a large sums of those monies budgeted by the government for combating insurgency were misappropriated by top government, military and other security agencies' officials in collaboration with politicians and contractors supplying military hardware.
2. **Political Corruption:** Corruption of politics in Nigeria reclines behind the government's inability to effectively curb the Boko-Haram. Politics that practiced rightly produces good human security for the citizens, on the contrary in Nigeria, it is has been used for the wrong purpose by politicians and traditional rulers even on life threatening issue such as insurgency. Enhancing human security in a comprehensive term, which has been threatened, depends on politicians and traditional leaders' greater determination and willingness to stop local support for Boko-Haram; without which the impression will persist that they are not really interested in ending the sect's threats (ICG, 2014).
3. **Regionalism:** The unwillingness of most northern politicians and traditional rulers in the region to support the then federal government of Jonathan in its war against Boko-Haram worsen the situation. A compelling argument for local politicians and traditional rulers support for the group is not unconnected with the power shift question and regionalism.
4. **The Reactive Nature of the Government:** In most instances, the Nigerian government has been mostly reactive to events even when it had prior information of a brewing crisis situation. It is unfortunate to note that even when the government had information that the Boko Haram was stocking arms the government initially ignored the reports on the sects prior to 2009 (Alao, Atere and Alao, 2013). Little wonder that the escalation of insurgency attacks in early 2010 caught the government flat-footed (ICG, 2014).

5. **Underfunding:** Underfunding, lack of equipment, poor intelligence, corruption complicity, interagency rivalries, and lack of effective political leadership (ICG 2014 & Blanchard 2014).
6. **Underpayment Of Foot Soldiers:** Although this accusation was refuted by top military and other security agencies officials, but the event that provoked some ground troop to fire at their GOC, (the commandant of 7th Division in Borno state) who was immediately replaced (Blanchard, 2014) and the near mutiny situation by soldiers due to poor welfare in Adamawa state, support this fact.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The paper examined the issues and challenges of government efforts in curbing Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. Issues relating to conceptual clarification, history, causes and effects of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria were also x-rayed. The conclusions that may be drawn include the fact that despites government efforts in curbing the menace of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, there is an increase in the use of children and teenagers especially the female ones for suicide bombing.

In view of the above, the following recommendations are made:

1. Anti-terrorism laws are to be strengthened and enforced whereas the sponsors of terrorist acts must be brought to book irrespective of who they are.
2. Communities should be given the power to monitor their own security and develop a strong liaison with the security services. Inter-security cooperation and intelligence sharing will be very necessary in the fight against terrorism (Mu'azu, 2011).
3. Effective information management is crucial in the fight against insurgency. Harmonization of intelligence operations which involves gathering, dissemination, direction and control of information should be integrated in a central operating unit.
4. The personnel involved in the fight against insurgency should be properly trained on how to fight the insurgents effectively.
5. The security apparatus in the country should be strengthened to be able to confront any challenges to the state right from the entry point into the country from the neighboring countries. This implies proper manning of the borders to stop the influx of small arms used in the various activities of the insurgents.
6. There should also be adequate collaboration and partnership between the governments, non-governmental organizations as well as civil society organizations in order to curb this menace.

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